New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1948

Volume IX, Number 8 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of March 22, 1948

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"Joy to the World"

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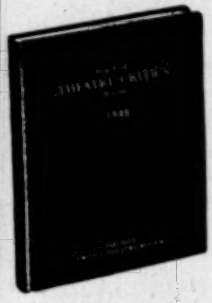

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"Joy to the World"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

MARCH 19, 1948

By HOWARD BARNES

And Joyous It Is!

THE gayest and most substantial commentary on Hollywood doings that the stage has yet effected has come to the Plymouth. "Joy to the World" mixes fancy, farce and documentary reporting so delightfully that this Allan Scott play deserves all the success which it is most certain to have. With Alfred Drake, Marsha Hunt, Myron McCormick, Morris Carnovsky and a number of other astute players interpreting the sense and nonsense of film producing, brilliant direction by Jules Dassin and an appropriate Harry Horner setting, the newest show of the season is one of the best. Here, in an elegant theatrical package, is the west coast factory of dreams in all its pretentiousness, its idealism and its manifold human conflicts.

• • •

It is not a new subject which Scott has tackled in his piece. George S. Kaufman lampooned the business of picture-making superbly in "Once in a Lifetime." There was a memorable work called "Queer People" in the mid-thirties. Those and kindred dramas were shooting at sitting ducks. "Joy to the World" considers the screen with respect as well as irony. The producer who is the center of the offering may be fictitious, but he is so much the prototype of second generation film chiefs that there is never the slightest question that he is someone of "outrageous genius." The others in the work, from the head of the research department, or the publicity man down to the office boy, are extraordinarily authentic. Scott was wise to concentrate on people rather than ideas. The latter are somewhat overdrawn at times. The folk of this Hollywood saga are singularly real.

• • •

The action is chiefly concerned with the plight of a vice-president, who reads a speech attacking film censorship without having the slightest idea what it contains. When he realizes that he is lined up on the right side, he gets tough, along with a very comely research assistant and a cynical press agent. He gets fired, of course, when the New York board of directors go to town on him, but he winds up very much in the saddle. Scott has been corny on more than one occasion in pulling off his exposition. Along with the sentimentality and some rather specious exhortations, he has written a very warm and moving drama.

• • •

It has been brilliantly produced by John Houseman and William R. Katzell. Not only in the physical mise en scene does "Joy to the World" capture the crazy quality of motion-picture manufacture. The company never misses a trick. Drake again demonstrates that he is a far better actor than a hoofer as the film tycoon. Miss Hunt is extremely competent as the romantic interest and McCormick lifts every scene with wry humor in the part of the publicity man. Carnovsky comes on stage late and briefly, but it is one of the most stunning roles any actor could wish for. He does magnificently with it, as he gives the supposedly subversive producer another chance at turning out photoplays. Mary Welch, Lois Hall, Hugh Rennie, Kurt Kasznar and Bert Freed are some of those who give the Plymouth exhibit the clear ring of a realized dramatic achievement. "Joy to the World" is savagely satirical, but it is a joy to Broadway.

'JOY TO THE WORLD.'

"JOY TO THE WORLD" at the Plymouth Theatre. Presented by John Houseman and William R. Katzell. Play by Allan Scott. Directed by Jules Dassin. Setting designed by Harry Horner. Costumes by Beverly Woodbury. Lighting by Joan Rosenthal.

CAST

Mary Magill	Mary Welch
Floyd	Michael Ivorfton
Mildred	Lois Hall
Edith Wilson	Peggy Maley
J. Newton McKeen	Myron McCormick
Mortimer Seymour	Louis Lissey
Richard Simpton	Hugh Rennie
Edward F. Gannon	Bert Freed
Alexander Soren	Alfred Drake
Thwarthy	Morris Revere
Ann	Marsha Hunt
Steve Walton	Herb Rainer
Barbara Benton	Lucille Patton
Henry Saltzberg	Walter F. Appel
John V. Hooper	Clay Clement
Dmitri Osmanakoff	Kurt Kasznar
Sampson	Hal Gerson
Mr. Wilson	Theodore Newton
Harry	Sam Bonnell
Sam Blumenfeld	Morris Carnovsky

SYNOPSIS—The entire action of the play takes place in the offices of Alexander Soren, vice-president in charge of production of Allas-Continental Pictures. Time: The present. Act I. Late afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. A few days later. Late at night. Scene 2. One week later. Mid-day. Act III. Two days later. Late afternoon.

DAILY NEWS

MARCH 19, 1948

'Joy to the World' Handsomely Produced Play About Hollywood

By JOHN CHAPMAN

As one who has covered the studio beat, I know that Hollywood is an interesting place, and a funny one, of course. It has its screwballs and its nitwits, and its serious, intelligent people, too. Any play about Hollywood which is done with any knowledge at all, like Allan Scott's "Joy to the World," is bound to be reasonably interesting and amusing.

But "reasonably" is about all I can say concerning Mr. Scott's play, which was very handsomely presented last evening at the Plymouth. It has the screwballs and the intelligent people; it contains most of the standard Hollywood jokes like the one about the hypochondriacs trading pills with each other; it has the frantic pace one has been trained to expect, and it is played by an amiable company—but it makes the mistake of getting thoughtful about itself.

"Joy to the World" is written in comic terms but it is a serious play about a producer who is courageous enough to want to buck censorship—not the censorship of dirt but the censorship of ideas. Hollywood certainly is worth taking seriously, and any fight for the freedom of the film is on the right side—but last evening Mr. Scott failed to make me more than mildly interested in the adventures of Alfred Drake

Miss Hunt Is Nice.

Mr. Drake, playing an executive producer—a combination, I'd say, of Irving Thalberg, Walter Wanger and D. O. Selznick—has an amusing office filled with electrical gadgets and peopled by recognizable movie types. He makes a liberal speech on the air and gets in trouble with the front office. He falls in love with Marsha Hunt (nice work, that, too), gets blacklisted by the combination and is saved when an old-time independent operator who might be Samuel Goldwyn offers him his studio.

I laughed at some of the jokes, admired Harry Horner's setting, liked the technical skill with which the action and the electrical gadgets were managed and approved the casting of a large company—but I just couldn't see why everybody would raise such a stink merely because Mr. Drake wanted to produce a movie about the life of Samuel Gompers. This, to me, was as anticlimactic as if Mr. Drake had been bounced and blacklisted for planning to film a documentary on the care and feeding of Baby Leroy.

A Sound Purpose.

Mr. Scott's purpose is sound enough. He thinks Hollywood should take an adult part in life and not be a mere purveyor of joy to the world. He knows his film people—his producers, secretaries, publicity men and head office ogres—and they are not as farcical as they were in "Once in a Lifetime." But "Once in a Lifetime" was a splendid job of playmaking and "Joy to the World" is something less than that.

Miss Hunt, a movie actress, is excellent. So is Mr. Drake as a package of energy and enthusiasm. Myron McCormick plays a press-agent role amusingly, and Mary Welch, Clay Clement and Morris Carnovsky are only a few of an interestingly chosen cast which Jules Dassin, the director, has kept on its toes. Mr. Scott had just about everything on his side except that confounded movie about the life of Samuel Gompers.

Daily Mirror

MARCH 19, 1948

'Joy to World' Pulls Lightning Changes

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Picture "Once in a Lifetime," copiously larded with pathos and propaganda, and you will have a working idea of what "Joy to the World" is like. It is like a chameleon in its moods, switching from farce to satire to melodrama to soapbox.

Author Allan Scott is irked with conditions in Hollywood. So he has told the story of a cinema wonder boy who broadcasts a speech written for him by the head of his studio's research department, and there are immediate repercussions.

The speech attacked censorship by government or organized groups, and argued the right of the film companies to make any sort of pictures they wanted. The company's backers, Washington bigshots and irate citizens sent protests.

So the wonder boy put the Dr. Wood, Phd., who had written the speech, on the carpet and she turned out to be an attractive girl liberal. She succeeded in persuading the wonder boy to fall in love with her and fight for her views.

So his backers tossed him out on his ear, other studios decided to let him remain on it, and then one of the movie pioneers who had fired the wonder boy ten years before came to the rescue.

He not only hired the wonder boy, but left him his fortune in a new will.

It seems the pioneer's son, killed in war, had liked the wonder boy. So the pioneer and his wife decided the wonder boy could make films that would prevent another war. We wish it were that easy, that films would stop totalitarian, brutalitarian dictatorships from conquering befuddled democracies with Quisling's blackjacks and machine-guns. Cold war, I think they call it.

Under Jules Dassin's energetic direction, a top-flight cast acts the Scott essay with express-train speed. The players reel it off so fast they don't give you time to weigh its flaws and fallacies.

Alfred Drake is excellent as the wonder boy and Marsha Hunt is a cute Dr. Wood. Dependable Myron McCormick is first-rate as a cynical, hard-drinking press agent. Some playwright is going to surprise us one of these days with a press agent who isn't cynical and doesn't touch the stuff.

Other capables in the large cast are Clay Clement, Morris Carnovsky, Mary Welch, Peggy Maley, Hugh Rennie, Bert Freed, Harris Brown, Leslie Litomy, Kurt Kasznar, Theodore Newton, Lois Hall and Michael Dreyfuss. There are enough competent players in this simple paragraph to stock three plays.

Producers John Houseman and William Katzell must have paid a pretty penny for the lush Harry Horner set and the flashy Beverly Woodner costumes.

Though a majority of the first nighters in the Plymouth Theatre blistered their palms applauding "Joy to the World," we would just as soon have remained by our fireside reading "Once in a Lifetime" and assorted orations by Hank Wallace and Cowboy Glen Taylor.

New York World-Telegram

MARCH 19, 1948

'Joy to the World' Laughs at Hollywood

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

As of last night there is a new comedy in town that can rock audiences, cause them to think, and leave them feeling well informed about one of the most mysterious businesses in the world.

"Joy to the World" is not only an uproarious couple of hours of entertainment. It gives a pathetic dignity to the motion picture industry at the same time that it satirizes its insanities.

Pulling no punches about the precocious immaturity and the wild pace of production, this play hymns the picture business with a frustrated adoration. The loss of a chief studio executive becomes as personal and agonizing as a high school principal's resignation.

Although the spine of the story is a fight against censorship, the play never slows down to soap box about personal convictions.

Cash or Integrity.

Alex Soren makes a startling speech against the forces that would violate the honesty of the screen as an influential medium. When pressure like a steel die begins to land on him, he admits that he had never read the speech until he picked it up to make it public.

The head of his research department has written it. This "Doctor" turns out to be a comely female Ph. D. The rest of the play concerns the question of whether he will renege on his true beliefs in order to go on making commercially successful pictures, or will actively mirror the calm integrity of the girl with whom he has fallen in love.

His salvation may be somewhat gratuitous, but the method by which he capitalizes on a chance to go with another company, winds the play up with an entirely delightful and gratifying finish.

There are touches that will tickle anyone familiar with Hollywood, and laughingly enlighten those who are not.

A Fine Pace.

The luxury of a studio executive's office; the dependence on pills, telephones and Gallup polls; the phony mannerisms to save face and time, are all Hollywood through an electric eye.

Perhaps the most illuminating touch is the behavior of the wealthy backer of the studio. While he manipulates the truth to prevent Alex making what sounds like a very dull picture on the history of labor, he calmly suggests that he will take over the active control of production at the studio. Stranger things have happened, and it may explain before your eyes some four out of the last five celluloid turkeys you have sat through.

The play has a finely modulated pace. When it is racy, it moves at a blinding rate. The transitions are subtle, and the calmer sequences are mellow without sagging.

A completely human and charming two-way seduction goes to prove that the sexes respond pretty much the same way anywhere in the world.

Unquestionably one of the major contributions to this production is the stimulating and acute performance of Alfred Drake as Soren, the displaced studio head.

Immense Vigor.

Drake has a piercing appreciation of what this man is about. He makes his humorlessness acutely funny in a remarkably controlled session of acting. He has immense vigor and speed when needed, and touching bafflement in defeat. This play should mark the threshold of a new, more important career for him.

As his wry publicity man, Myron McCormick plays with deft ingenuity. He adds nuances and an uncanny tempo to an amusing role, so the character becomes dimensional in itself, and at the same time sharpens theperspective of Drake's part.

Marsha Hunt is highly personable as the Doctor, lending the girl an aloof warmth which suggests exactly the sophistication that would have allowed her to survive. A film veteran in real life, Miss Hunt will be even better when she is less careful.

Morris Carnovsky has what amounts to a monologue in the third act, and makes it coolly touching without once falling into the grotesque pitfalls that stare him in the face throughout the scene.

Mary Welch is sharply on her toes as an omnipresent secretary whom she keeps strictly in the frame of the play, and Kurt Kasznar fractically claims to have written "Rosenkavalier."

Clay Clement is entirely believable as the autocratic backer.

Of everyone connected with it, no one deserves more credit for the delight of "Joy to the World" than the director, Jules Dassin.

Journal my American

MARCH 19, 1948

A Showy, Insincere Play On Hollywood

By ROBERT GARLAND

Slick, showy, obviously insincere, Allan Scott's "Joy to the World" came riding high last night into the Plymouth. Riding with it—"on it" is the more fitting phrase—were Alfred Drake and Marsha Hunt, as stars; Myron McCormick and Morris Carnovsky, as featured players.

Mr. Scott, who has done this sort of thing before, has written his farce with one eye on the East Coast box-office and the other on the West Coast motion-picture rights. And, even if his tongue is in his cheek where both Coasts are concerned, his play belongs to neither.

Realizing this, perhaps, his producers—John Houseman and William Katzell — have given "Joy to the World" a high-toned production. There's becoming scenery by Harry Horner, becoming costumes by Beverly Woodner and becoming never-pause-to-think pacing by Jules Dassin.

The outcome is a slick, cocky and obviously insincere projection of a slick, cocky and obviously insincere needling of the Hollywood of "Once In a Lifetime" rather than of the Hollywood of Hollywood. There's no reason why the latter shouldn't pay a pretty penny for it.

• • •

Hardening Ideals

Even if it doesn't, Alexander Soren is Vice-President in Charge of Production at Atlas-Continental Pictures. His Culver City office is a bedizened replica of the stage-setting for "The Voice of the Turtle," with a bar instead of a sink, a couch instead of a bed.

An erstwhile idealist, Mr. Soren suffers from hardening of the ideals. Such a sufferer is he that, under the influence of haste and liquor, he reads a speech over the microphone that puts Hollywood on a spot and Atlas-Continental Pictures out on a limb.

Who wrote that speech? Nobody knows! Then, by elimination's artful aid, its iconoclastic author turns out to be one Dr. Wood. And Dr. Wood turns out to be a young lady from the Research Department: Ann, who has made it up by piecing her boss's odd remarks together.

So away to Palm Springs they go, adding moral turpitude to love-at-first-sight. But old Sam Blumenfeld comes Marine-like to their rescue, giving Alex and Ann his blessing, his rival motion-picture outfit and any number of million dollars to do what he likes with.

• • •

Worthy Hands

What he likes to do, I gather, is accept old Sam Blumenfeld's blessing and his rival motion-picture outfit. And, with these, plus the unnumbered million dollars, he'll make an immortal shadow-play biography glorifying the late lamented Samuel Gompers.

Alex and Ann are in the worthy hands of Alfred Drake and Marsha Hunt. Mr. Drake, who reaches stardom by way of Brooklyn and "Oklahoma," is a vital vice-president. Miss Hunt, who reaches stardom by way of Chicago and 50 motion-pictures, is a radiant researcher.

Myron McCormick, who reached a featured role by way of Albany, in Indiana, and "State of the Union," plays the Spike McManus role all over again. This time, his lines occasionally throw him. Morris Carnovsky, a product of St. Louis, acts like an Adler.

The others, neither starred nor featured, add up to competence. Yet, despite themselves, their superiors and production, "Joy to the World" isn't what I'd call successful. Too frequently it outsmarts itself by playing both Coasts against the middle of obvious insincerity.

PM EXCLUSIVE

MARCH 21, 1948

Kronenberger

A Hollywood Comedy Has Hollywood Ways

There are funny bits in Allan Scott's play about Hollywood, and lively touches, and nice liberal sentiments. But all in all *Joy to the World* is merely trashy—and only the more trashy for manifesting some sense of what's true. Mr. Scott, in other words, is almost worse damned by what's good about him than by what's bad. He is one of those who, while lining up on the side of progress, line up equally on the side of piffle. He is one of those who while satirizing Hollywood in one breath, imitate and even outdo it in the next. He is one of those who, forced to choose between God and Mammon, try to bow down before both.

• • •

And in spite of all his maneuvers—in spite, too, of an extremely effective production — Mr. Scott doesn't pull it off on his own terms; doesn't prove a quite smart enough hack. For God and Mammon don't mix; and slickness is as hard to sustain for three hours as most things else; and you can't protest too passionately against censorship in Hollywood when you're passionately concerned with dollars-and-censorship on Broadway. Mr. Scott gets in some useful licks about Hollywood's current exhibition of panic and fright, about the crucial importance of a free screen; he himself is plainly on the side of the angels. The trouble is, he's so much on the side of the angels he wants to get back their investment for them, and a handsome profit besides.

• • •

The trouble, too, is that the propaganda displays about as much real art as the playwriting; and before very long, in fact, it becomes just so much fodder for the plot. The plot, like that in so many recent liberal Broadway concoctions, turns on a pretty woman's courage, integrity, and ability to influence her man. I don't think this recurring twist is meant to argue that men have no guts or ideals of their own; I rather suspect it's the one plot that a certain calibre of mind has so far doped out, in which sex and social thinking can be combined on equal terms. Perhaps at least a slight variation on it will be discovered in the next few years. Meanwhile sex comes off quite handsomely at the Plymouth in the form of Marsha Hunt, who in her first Broadway role acts almost as winningly as she looks.

• • •

More specifically, *Joy to the World* tells how Alexander Soren, one of Hollywood's geniuses and vice-presidents in charge of production, unwittingly makes a radio speech denouncing censorship, tangles with the big boss, defies him with Marsha Hunt's help, and gets fired and blacklisted. At this point, a movie magnate named Sam Blumenfeld, who was carefully planted in Act I, suddenly comes up and bursts into full bloom—offers to bury a hatchet with Soren that had seemed as big as a house; asks Soren to make all his pictures for him; and (his own son having been killed in the war) designates Soren his $14,000,000 heir. I ought not to make a joke of Mr. Blumenfeld's ten minutes on the stage, for the effect—further darkened by Morris Carnovsky's hamming — was not funny; it was so outrageous in so many ways as to be quite disgusting.

• • •

This is merely the worst of the trash that litters *Joy to the World*, that robs its liberalism of its lustre, and its satire of its edge. Though he does little that hasn't been done before, Mr. Scott manages at times to be lively and even convincing about Hollywood; then the plot or something calls time on him; and out pops the piffle. Certainly Mr. Scott has no one but himself to blame for failing; for Jules Dassin has staged things very briskly, Harry Horner has housed them very cleverly, and most of the cast performs with skill. Alfred Drake makes an admirable Soren, Clay Clement a convincing big boss, Myron McCormick a model helpful publicity man; and there are many pleasant performances in smaller roles.

—Louis Kronenberger

The New York Times

MARCH 19, 1948

'Joy to the World' a Comedy About Hollywood Foibles and Censorship

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In the course of random Hollywood affairs in "Joy to the World," which was put on at the Plymouth last evening, Allan Scott mentions censorship and the artistic integrity of picture-making. Since these are important subjects, they help to confuse matters a good deal. For at heart, "Joy to the World" is a knockabout Hollywood comedy, composed almost exclusively of subordinate details and staged like a comic horse-race.

If Mr. Scott wants us to regard "Joy to the World" as a protest against the moral cowardice of Hollywood, the harum-scarum tone of the play as a whole is distracting. Taken as a cartoon of Hollywood life, it is Grade B stuff—still below the level of "Once In a Lifetime."

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When Mr. Scott is in a responsible frame of mind, "Joy to the World" is the drama of a talented production manager who fights the chairman of the board to make pictures about people. The chairman regards Hollywood as a business and for business reasons dedicates his studio to escape entertainment. The vice president in charge of production wants to make fine pictures—one in particular about the life of Samuel Gompers.

His girl is a liberal and an idealist. If you knew the formula for this sort of thing, you can bet your last dollar that she strengthens her hero's backbone and brings out the best qualities in his character. "Joy to the World" is strictly a formula job. Since so much is at stake in the ethical topics Mr. Scott raises, the mediocrity of his writing and the meretriciousness of his comedy gags are embarrassing. There is a kind of distasteful opportunism about the whole range of his play.

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Jules Dassin has directed it lickety-split, inside a pair of stream-lined offices, expertly designed by Harry Horner and expertly lighted by Jean Rosenthal, a cast of expert actors takes the comedy marathon at high speed. Alfred Drake plays the perplexed picture-maker with resilience; and Marsha Hunt, who is uncommonly beautiful, supplies the spiritual influence painlessly. Myron McCormick is back in a familiar spot as the cynical press officer. As a venerable and independent motion-picture manufacturer, Morris Carnovsky gives a warm portrait of a sentimental part.

After the fashion of centrifugal show comedy, there are sharply sketched characterizations all through the performance—Mary Welch as the efficient secretary, Hugh Rennie, Leslie Litomy and Bert Freed as studio executives, Clay Clement as an unscrupulous chairman of the board and Theodore Newton as a sour radio man. There are some explosive gags every now and then. But "Joy to the World" begins and ends the evening with some gestures toward integrity in the motion-picture industry. As a piece of theatre it has no integrity of its own.

The Sun

MARCH 19, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE

Hollywood Examined Entertainingly.

Hollywood, that singular community lying to the west of the San Bernardino mountains, again comes up for examination in a rowdy, frenzied and professionally produced play, "Joy to the World," which was brought into the Plymouth last night. John Houseman and William R. Katzell make the presentation.

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Allan Scott, who knows his Vine street and its incredible way of life, wrote "Joy to the World." His comedy is at its weakest in its social-significance phases, when it is given over to being a play with a message, and it is at its best when Alfred Drake and Marsha Hunt are talking as two people in love might actually talk. Miss Hunt, making her Broadway debut, is completely delightful and something should be done immediately to bring her into the play's final scene.

It's loose-jointed, this "Joy to the World." It is crammed with odds and ends of peculiar interest to those associated with the Hollywood setup, and Playwright Scott has quite a time in bringing his final curtain down, but he has written enough amusing scenes to make his comedy more than passable.

The story is this: Alexander Soren, dynamic Hollywood producer, delivers a radio address attacking censorship and condemning the screen's concern with inconsequentials. His speech was written by a bright girl researcher, a Ph. D., with whom he falls in love. The chairman of the board demands a retraction via a broadcast and it is then that the beautiful researcher threatens a walk-out. Soren stands by his speech, gets fired and is rescued, Hollywood fashion, by a film magnate who had discharged him ten years before.

The scenes between Alfred Drake and Marsha Hunt, playing the research girl, are the play's best. Drake puts a lot of vitality into his playing as the driving and idealistic producer. Myron McCormick is effective as a cynical publicity man. Morris Carnovsky gives a good actor's actory performance as the aging, haggard, sentimental screen pioneer around whom the author has written the ending of his play. Clay Clement, Mary Welch and Bert Freed contribute to the general uproar of the evening. Jules Dassin has staged the play for speed. Harry Horner has contributed a good setting.

"Joy to the World" is mechanical and clamorous. It won't stimulate you or elevate you, but it won't bore you. A lot of it is good fun. And Marsha Hunt is a talented and decorative new player in Broadway's world. She's welcome to New York.

New York Post

MARCH 19, 1948

A Hollywood Comedy With High Ideals

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

Although I must confess that I am no great admirer of the Hollywood comedy called "Joy to the World," which opened at the Plymouth Theatre last night, I found one reason for selfish personal satisfaction in it. As an intermittent film student I have for some time been an enthusiastic admirer of a young movie actress named Marsha Hunt. It has been my impression that she possessed a quality of intelligent beauty that was too intangible for the cinema metropolis to appreciate, and that the theatre was the place for her to receive proper acclaim. Making her stage debut in the new play by Allan Scott, Miss Hunt proceeded to prove how right I was.

As an idealistic young doctor of philosophy attempting to reform Hollywood, she played with such grace, loveliness and quiet humor that she gave honesty and warmth to a comedy somewhat in need of such traits, and scored one of the authentic personal triumphs of the season. As a reviewer who is at times unaccountably wrong in his predictions, I am grateful to Miss Hunt for justifying one of them. I also have respect for the acting of Alfred Drake, and his portrayal of one of those dashing young geniuses of film manufacture was likewise one of the comforts of the evening.

Good Production

Indeed, the entire production accorded "Joy to the World" is commendable. John Houseman and William R. Katzell have given it the fond and meticulous care of two perfectionist producers, and Jules Dassin's staging is shrewd and rescurceful. In addition, the performances are, if a little noisy, invariably skillful. Myron McCormick, for example, plays his now inevitable role of a cynical but sentimental press agent with his customary shrewdness; Morris Carnovsky brings his fine talents to the last-act part of a veteran producer, and Mary Welch as one of those wise secretaries and Bert Freed as the studio manager are in excellent form.

If I take some time in getting around to my objections to "Joy to the World" it is chiefly due to an admiration for its presentation and a conviction that there is an audience which will appreciate it more than I did. But it is also the result of my approval of the way it stands on the side of the angels. For its author believes that the screen is a potentially valuable medium of expression, hates the reign of terror and thought control to which it is currently subjected, and detests its censorship of fear.

Its Story

Nevertheless, the story of the young producer who, inspired by the love of a beautiful girl, finally decides to fight for the right to make intelligent pictures seems to me mechanical, labored and flat. Although people rush around a lot and scream at each other, there isn't much dramatic or farcical excitement in it, and there is a minimum of skill in its plot development. For one thing, the old producer, who is introduced in the last act to provide a happy ending, is so badly prepared for that, when he comes on, a lengthy and tedious exposition is required to explain him.

Then, too, I doubt if the actual matter of film making is as fascinating as its author and producers suspect. Granting the importance of the motion picture in the modern world, Hollywood isn't really a very dramatic place, and its trivia and personal references are possibly a little bit tiresome to those not professionally concerned with them. Furthermore, "Joy to the World" is unnecessarily long, a fault characteristic of the medium it studies. Mr. Scott's play has undoubted earnestness of purpose, but it seemed to me as mechanical as Hollywood.

"You Never Can Tell"

New York Post

MARCH 17, 1948

'You Never Can Tell' Good Shavian Fun

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Mr. Shaw was in an easy going mood back in 1896 when he wrote "You Never Can Tell," which the Theatre Guild offered in a handsome production at the Martin Beck last night. He frankly called it a "potboiler" and appears never to have had a very high opinion of it. To a certain extent, the great man was right, for it assuredly isn't among his major masterpieces. But Shaw in even one of his less Olympian flights is so much more delightful a writer of comedy than anyone else visible today that, for all its dawdling moments, "You Never Can Tell" remains winning, graceful and charming.

There is no getting around the obtrusive fact that the greatest living Irishman is an extremely garrulous fellow. Never a man to use one word when a dozen will do, he does let his characters talk on and on until even their brightness and wit tend to fade just a little. Since "You Never Can Tell" is not concerned with important social or ethical issues but is merely an amiable little romantic comedy, this loquacity is a bit more noticeable than usual. There is playful intelligence in it, but not the deep wisdom of the greater works, because there is no call for it. But the Shavian charm always comes to the rescue.

The Shaw Style

It is that charm and the exceptional grace of an incomparable prose style which give the play its attractiveness. In truth, "You Never Can Tell," which has its dramatic deficiencies, is a triumph of style over matter. For it really hasn't a great deal to say, save that people shouldn't guide their lives too much by copy-book maxims. There is humor in it, and high spirits, but not a great deal of the author's characteristic wit. The important thing is that the wonderfully engaging quality of a great playwright's antic imagination and beguiling personality makes its reasonably commonplace material strangely endearing.

Having no particular skill in telling plots, I find some difficulty in making clear just what "You Never Can Tell" is all about. Anyway, it is concerned with an impecunious young dentist who falls in love with a girl who fancies herself advanced and unromantic; a tactful and understanding waiter, whose son is a successful barrister; a boy and girl from Madeira who scorn the conventions and don't want anyone else to get a word in; a lady author of high liberal principles, and an irascible father who screams at his children and wants them to love him. I must admit there are times when it seems like the libretto for a musical show.

The Production

This is the first time I have ever seen a production of "You Never Can Tell." I am unable, therefore, to make any comparisons with the past, but I feel sure that the roles of the splendid waiter and the romantic dentist couldn't be much better played than in the current performance. Everyone has known for a long time that Leo G. Carroll is one of the best actors on the American stage, and he is splendid as the understanding servitor; Tom Helmore, who made a name for himself in "The Day Before Spring" a few years ago, is a comedian of exceptional ease, humor and charm, and he is a delight as the dashing dentist.

There is a bright and charming portrayal of the child from Madeira by young Patricia Kirkland, and William Devlin has a fine last-act appearance as the somewhat terrifying barrister. Faith Brook as the heroine, Walter Hudd as a respectable ex-radical, Ralph Forbes as the irate father, Frieda Inescort as the mother and Nigel Stock as the young man from Madeira round out an excellent cast. The sets and costumes are colorful and attractive. "You Never Can Tell" may be less than a riot, but it is still engaging fun.

'YOU NEVER CAN TELL'

YOU NEVER CAN TELL, a revival of the George Bernard Shaw comedy. Staged by Peter Ashmore; scenery and costumes by Stewart Chaney; production under the supervision of Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner; presented by the Theatre Guild, in association with Alfred Fischer. At the Martin Beck Theatre.

Dolly	Patricia Kirkland
Valentine	Tom Helmore
Maid	Scott Douglas
Philip	Nigel Stock
Mrs. Clandon	Frieda Inescort
Gloria	Faith Brook
Crampton	Ralph Forbes
McComas	Walter Hudd
Waiter	Leo G. Carroll
Bohun	William Devlin

SYNOPSIS: The action takes place at a seaside resort in Devon, England, in August, 1896. Act. I. Valentine's room. Morning. Act. II. The terrace of the Marine Hotel. Noon. Act III. A sitting-room in the hotel. Afternoon. Act IV. Same as Act III. Evening.

Journal American

MARCH 17, 1948

GBS' Potboiler Boils Along Quite Mildly

By ROBERT GARLAND

After last night's handsome reissue by The Theatre Guild, I'm inclined to believe that Bernard Shaw's "You Never Can Tell" is a somewhat better play than its author thinks it is.

Unlike Mr. Shaw, I wasn't in the least ashamed of its tricks, laughs and popularities. Neither were the more Shavian minded members of the initial congregation.

Since before the turning of the century, it has been the fashion to belittle "You Never Can Tell."

George Alexander, the actor, had no more idea what the author meant by it than a tom cat. Fanny Coleman, the actress, complained that it had neither laughs nor exits. William Archer, the critic, called it a formless and empty farce.

And Bernard Shaw, joining the crepe-hangers, replied that he was ashamed of its tricks, laughs and popularities, that it was a frightful example of the result of trying to write for the *theatre de nos jours* and that, as a potboiler written for immediate production, "You Never Can Tell" doesn't interest him. On the other hand—

Well, "You Never Can Tell" has usually managed to interest the more Shavian minded members of almost any congregation. And there's nothing really wrong about a potboiler as long as it, as well as the pot, is boiling.

• • •

Too Talky

And, after well nigh half a century, "You Never Can Tell" comes to the boiling point not too infrequently, even as it simmers more or less sedately in between.

There's no doubt that last night's reissue, along with "Man and Superman" at the Hudson, talks too much for its own good. Both would be better off for a strenuous blue-penciling.

Especially, I fear, the "You Never Can Tell" that's at the Martin Beck. Bernard Shaw has never been a playwright to use one word when three words will suffice. And the farcical story of the dentist and his free-thinking lady-friend is the rule rather than the exception. Now, at the age of ninety-two, Mr. Shaw should accept his share of cutting.

But, not accepting it, the reissue on 45th st. goes on and on to tell the story of three characters in search of a father, of how an unsuccessful young dentist meets up with Gloria, the oldest of the trio, of how he woos and wins her for her fortune rather than for any other charms she may possibly possess. A straight shooter, Valentine!

He, too, is inclined to talk too much. Only William the Waiter, acting as the humblest *deus ex machina*, manages to make his prodigious prattlement as fascinating as Mr. Shaw intended.

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Carroll Skillful

Leo Carroll is responsible for the waiter's bearability. His is a performance so skillful in its assumed simplicity, so engaging in its artful under-playing, so disarming in its sweetness-that-is-strength, so everything it should be and so nothing that it shouldn't, that it alone is worth going to the Martin Beck to see. I guess I like it!

I like, too, the Mrs. Clandon of Frieda Inescort, the Mr. Crampton of Ralph Forbes, the Gloria of Faith Brook, the Valentine of Tom Helmore and the Bohun of William Devlin. As the younger members of the house of Clandon-Crampton, Patricia Kirkland and Nigel Stock sound more than a trifle shrill. Pat's a big girl now and no longer play acting the young Ruth Gordon.

Against pictorial backgrounds designed by Stewart Chaney's right hand in pictorial costumes designed by Mr. Chaney's left, the direction designed by Peter Ashmore isn't too distressingly uneven. His luncheon scene, depicted on the program, is the high spot of Mr. Ashmore's endeavors. It brought forth spontaneous applause last evening . . .

Yes, I'm inclined to believe that Bernard Shaw's "You Never Can Tell" is a somewhat better play than its author thinks it is. And, when you grow tired of listening, you can always look up to Leo Carroll's acting.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

MARCH 17, 1948

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Handsome Period Piece

PRODUCTION finesse and verbosity arrive at something of a stand-off in the revival of "You Never Can Tell", at the Martin Beck. The George Bernard Shaw comedy has more than one moment of comic eloquence as it discusses changing and enduring ideas at the turn of the century. It is staunchly interpreted by a cast which includes Leo G. Carroll, Ralph Forbes, Frieda Inescort, Tom Helmore, Faith Brook and Patricia Kirkland. With superb settings and costumes by Stewart Chaney and Peter Ashmore's nimble direction, it is a handsome period piece. But it is as dated as a hansom cab and not nearly as expeditious at getting from one point to another.

* * *

In 1905, when the play was first shown hereabouts, it must have seemed somewhat iconoclastic, as it portrayed a lady author who imagined herself a 20th century emancipated woman back in 1896, brought up three children in ignorance of their father, fostered socialism and decried sentiment. The Shavian rapier glints constantly throughout the proceedings today, giving speeches that wholeness which is so necessary in a solid farce and pinioning a climax so deftly that it almost makes up for a great deal of idle chatter which has preceded it. The celebrated dramatist was writing well for his particular period. He was far from his best.

* * *

The Theater Guild has realized all the fugitive bouquet of the piece. Instead of fortifying a theatrical antique with tricky stage business, it has allowed the work to remain something of a curiosity and something of a triumph. The revival is no such satisfying show as "Man and Superman," but that is the fault of the play. "You Never Can Tell" has not wanted in any respect as a brilliant recreation of a dated work. Carroll dominates the proceedings discreetly as the waiter whose son is a noted barrister, but there are no parts which lack knowing performance. Miss Inescort is wonderful as the modern-minded lady of the 90s; Helmore and Miss Brook play a languid romance with proper lack of emphasis, and William Devlin has a great bit in the ending as the barrister who unties a not too intricate Gordian knot.

* * *

Since period color is more important than the plot itself, it is all to the good that Forbes is on hand to give a resounding performance of the forsaken father. He is apoplectic to a delightful degree. Nigel Stock is fine in Mason who was brought up in Madeira and finds his father in a seaside resort in Devon. Walter Hudd's solicitor is right in the groove of a polished theatrical reconstruction. Ashmore has kept the piece lively when the script has warranted a bit of jigging, but has never forced the pace. And Chaney deserves several laurels for his lovely settings, his magnificent lighting and his Victorian costumes. "You Never Can Tell" lags. It is still well worth witnessing.

Daily Mirror

MARCH 17, 1948

Shaw Revival By Guild Clicks

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The Theatre Guild brought a delightful revival of G. B. Shaw's "You Never Can Tell" to the Martin Beck Theatre last night. Though Shaw wrote the comedy before this reviewer was born, it has aged much less than have we.

"You Never Can Tell" is an amusing and stimulating study of old intelligence versus emotion in marriage, a commentary on the paradoxical nature of man's and woman's approach to a problem and a compendium of wise and witty observations that you will wish you had been bright enough to compose.

Mrs. Clandon brings her two daughters and a son to a Devon resort in England, little reckoning that they are to encounter their irrascible, domineering, conventional husband and father. He happens to be Mr. Crampton, for along with putting him out of her life, Mrs. Clandon had even changed her name.

Mrs. Clandon is a writer and worse yet in Mr. Crampton's opinion, a feminist. She believes that women should have rights and should bring up their children to solve their difficulties scientifically. Mr. Crampton thinks that children should give unquestioning obedience to their parents, particularly their fathers.

Appalled by the flashy dress, the brash manners of his children, Mr. Crampton attempts to regain their legal control. But he finally is forced to compromise and recapture his family through understanding and affection. As for eldest daughter, Gloria—she found that love and not intellect eventually motivated her choice of a husband, a penniless young dentist.

Ralph Forbes gives one of his best performances as the hot-tempered Mr. Crampton, who today would be a doughty foe of the progressive school system. And Frieda Inescort matches it with her restrained impersonation of the no less determined but intellectual Mrs. Clandon.

Leo G. Carroll, as usual, is excellent as a kindly, sensible hotel waiter who has sired a son destined to become a mental giant of the law. Other first-rate performances are contributed by Faith Brook, Tom Helmore, Patricia Kirkland, Nigel Stock and Walter Hudd.

Miss Brook, daughter of film star Clive Brook, is a most promising young actress. She is attractive, has a sound technique and the scope to cope with high-powered emotional roles. Miss Kirkland, charming daughter of playwright Jack Kirkland and actress Nancy Carroll, has previously won salutes here in other plays.

William Devlin, as a dynamic legal eagle, is permitted by director Peter Ashmore to go a little stocky. He could tone down his performance a little without making it less effective.

The settings and costumes by Stewart Chaney are period joys.

"You Never Can Tell" towers head and shoulders, notably head, above a majority of the sorry theatre pieces we have been served this season. Some of the playwrights could learn from it that comedy can be wonderfully entertaining without being syruppy, sappy and offensively sexy.

DAILY NEWS

MARCH 17, 1948

Shaw's 'You Never Can Tell' Has A Nice Cast but It Sounds Stuffy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

During the second intermission of Bernard Shaw's "You Never Can Tell" at the Martin Beck last evening somebody in the aisle said to somebody else that it was the coldest audience he ever saw. I can't answer for any other Theatre Guild first-nighters, but am able to report that I wasn't cold—just sleepy.

The Guild has given a handsome production to this early Shaw number, with some stylish actors in it, and I find myself wondering why it went to all that trouble. The comedy is funny now and then, when it illuminates the frailty of both sexes, but it lacks the epigrammatic zip of "Man and Superman." A good deal of the talk—and there is, of course, a good deal of talk—seems to go in one ear and out the other.

Same Old Human Race.

In "You Never Can Tell" Shaw has begun his examination of the modern woman. Mrs. Clandon, a lady author of vigorous ideas, has for 18 years withheld from her two daughters and son all knowledge of who their father might be. They have been brought up as independent spirits—yet, when they do discover their father, the

old family tie binds them. And the elder daughter, a markedly positive and intelligent prospect for the oncoming Twentieth Century, succumbs to the simplest kind of lovemaking.

The stylish actors whom the Guild has assembled play in a number of styles, from Patricia Kirkland's squealing and romping as an uninhibited member of the younger generation to the quiet effectiveness of Leo Carroll's gentle appearance as an amiable old hotel waiter who thinks the human race will remain about the same as it always was.

Lawyers Caricatured.

I particularly admire the work of Faith Brook as the imperious elder daughter who falls for the same old mush from a struggling young dentist. Ralph Forbes is amusing as a choleric father, and Frieda Inescort plays the lady author firmly but with charm. Nigel Stock helps Miss Kirkland represent unbridled youth, and Tom Helmore is an affably amorous dentist.

Two lawyers, portrayed by Walter Hudd and William Devlin, become involved in Mr. Shaw's discussions of marriage, love and other elements of modernity, and they seem now to be rather crude caricatures. Indeed, the play itself seems to be a rather crude caricature. It is nicely mounted in Stewart Chaney sets and the women are done up in period costumes, and the Guild has done what it can in all departments.

I suppose it has been good for me to see "You Never Can Tell," because it hasn't been done here since 1915, and I guess I feel properly instructed and all that stuff. But I'm going out now for a cup of coffee.

The Sun

MARCH 17, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

A Very Mild Shavian Frolic.

George Bernard Shaw's "You Never Can Tell," given an ornamental production by the Theater Guild, is definitely one of the great man's minor achievements. This comedy of love and sex, which opened last evening at the Martin Beck, has a lively first act but it runs down steadily after that. It's a leisurely and up-and-down theater piece.

If you weren't around when Arnold Daly was putting on "You Never Can Tell" in 1906 and haven't caught up with it since, you might care to know that it's all about the efforts of the bright and outspoken Clandon children to recover a father, the one from whom their mother has been separated for eighteen years. And all that time she has been bringing them up in Madeira.

It's also a comedy—a garrulous comedy, of course—of Victorian morals and manners, of the emancipation of women, and of the wooing of the haughty and beautiful Gloria by the insolvent young dentist named Valentine. Much of "You Never Can Tell" is a frolic in the spirit of Congreve. Much of it—perhaps too much of it—is Shaw in one of his less inspired moods.

The Theater Guild has brought together a likable cast for this revival. The play is encased in Stewart Chaney's attractive settings and London's able Peter Ashmore is given playbill credit for the staging. It's also a fact that he went back to England two weeks prior to the New York premiere.

The evening's most engaging performance is that of Tom Helmore as Valentine, the ardent and penniless dentist. Helmore is a charming and thoroughly diverting player. Leo G. Carroll brings his skill and experience, his puttering and precise timing, to his playing of the tactful waiter. Ralph Forbes gets some humor into his characterization of the explosive and crusty Crampton, alias Clandon. Frieda Inescort is arch and imperious as the managing and forward-thinking Mrs. Clandon.

Faith Brook is a pleasing and good-loking Gloria, and there is bounce, plus charm, in the performance of Patricia Kirkland as the impudent Dolly. There are good performances from Nigel Stock, Walter Hudd and William Devlin, who comes along in the fourth act, when he is genuinely needed, to make Bohun an amusing fellow.

But pleasant acting can't make a satisfactory evening at the Martin Beck. "You Never Can Tell," brought back forty-three years after its first New York presentation, is a fragile comedy and a feeble one, and its pleasures are scattered.

The New York Times

MARCH 17, 1948

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Let's say this much for Bernard Shaw's "You Never Can Tell": no other comedy of that period would be even tolerable. Mr. Shaw wrote it in 1897, when he was very young—41, to be exact; and the Theatre Guild revived it at the Martin Beck last evening. One of the plays he labeled "pleasant," it represents the teacher of men in the unbecoming mood of writing a popular comedy.

It contains a good deal of old-fashioned stock material—the sagacious waiter, who is standard property in second-rate plays, and the artificial gaiety of a masquerade ball and false noses on solemn gentlemen. For novelty it offers a dentist chair in the first act in which a dentist is discovered just after a remarkably painless extraction and just before another. Incidentally, the patients convalesce at astonishing speed and seem to have just as many teeth after the extractions as before them.

* * *

But all this is secondary to the real substance of the evening, which is a cascade of talk out of the mouths of some voluble people. Compared to the talk in "Man and Superman," the dialogue in "You Never Can Tell" seems precocious now. Mr. Shaw was not digging in very deep. A half century ago it might have sounded fresh, for it dissects love iconoclastically, brushes impudently across the subject of socialism and punctures the pride of modernism in women. When Cyril Maude's company started rehearsing "You Never Can Tell" under Shaw's direction, it is said that the actors did not understand it, and after a fortnight's torture they abandoned the script. But unless we are fatuously deceiving ourselves, we understand it today. Worse than that, it is not very good.

Out of respect for the Shavian tradition, Peter Ashmore has directed a performance that persists in being bright. The humor is arch and stylized; the artifices are coy. You never can tell whether "You Never Can Tell" is as windily facetious as it sounds until you have seen it played like a comedy of sound common sense. Leo G. Carroll plays the part of the reflective waiter sensibly. He is quiet and well-mannered, without obsequiousness, and he speaks his lines as though he believed them. Mr. Carroll's performance is gifted and enjoyable.

But the rest of it is directed in a key that would make an ordinary farce unbearable. Granted that the parts of the two precocious children are distressing in the writing, they need not be full of impish poses and cute whirligigs, as in the lively playing of Patricia Kirkland and Nigel Stock. Bohun, the barrister, does not need to be pompously obtuse in the style of William Devlin. Old Man Crampton's boorishness does not have to be as flamboyant as Ralph Forbes makes him. At times he seems to have been left over from "The Bad Man."

As the priggish Gloria, Faith Brook may be strutting a little too imposingly, but at least she is playing for the part instead of the performance, and giving the character intelligible definition. As the amorous dentist, Tom Helmore is first-rate. He knows what the part is about and acts it with relish. As the bluestocking mother, Frieda Inescort gives a satisfactory though uninflected performance. Walter Hudd plays the part of the family solicitor unobjectionably.

Stewart Chaney's costumes and settings are gay and nicely suited to the script. But there is very little to praise about this production except the muscle and body tone of the actors. The brightness of the comedy is tarnished today. That might not be so apparent if Mr. Ashmore in the direction were not so anxious to make every moment ingenious and every line a gem of wit. He has overplayed Mr. Shaw's hand, and should be charged with compounding a felony.